

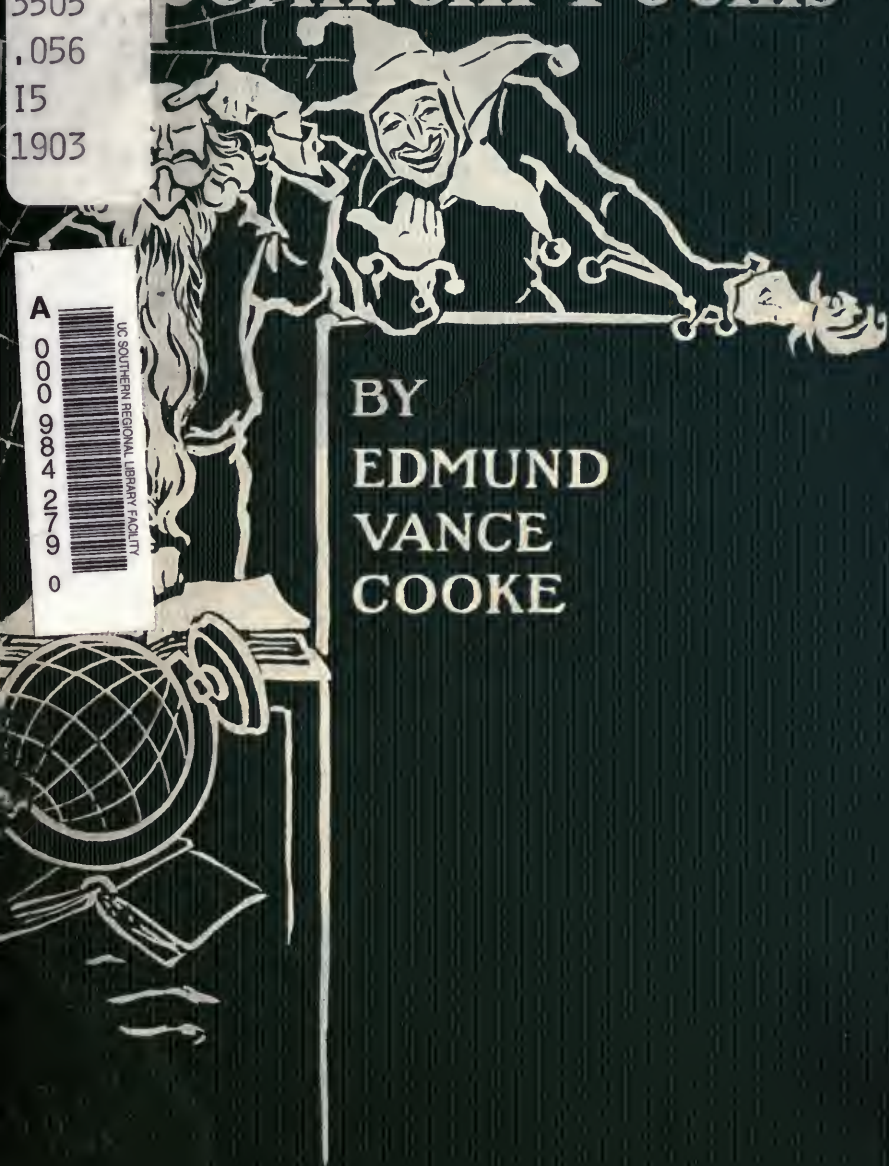
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# Irrelevant Poems

BY  
EDMUND  
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Impertinent Poems



# Impertinent Poems

By  
Edmund Vance Cooke

Author of "A Patch of Pansies,"  
"Rimes to be Read," etc.



BOSTON AND CHICAGO  
FORBES & COMPANY

1903

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EDMUND VANCE COOKE

*These Impertinent Poems  
are dedicated to whomever  
may like them.*

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## A PRE - IMPERTINENCE

Anticipating the intelligent critic of "Impertinent Poems," it may well be remarked that the chief impertinence is in calling them poems. Be that as it may, the editors and publishers of *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Ainslee's Magazine* share with the author the reproach of first promoting their publicity. That they are now willing to further reduce their share of the burden by dividing it with the present publishers entitles them to the thanks of the author and the gratitude of the book-buying public.

E. V. C.



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# IMPERTINENT POEMS



## DEAD MEN'S DUST

You don't buy poetry. (Neither do I.)

Why?

You cannot afford it? Bosh! you spend  
*Editions de luxe* on a thirsty friend.

You can buy any one of the poetry bunch  
For the price you pay for a business lunch.  
Don't you suppose that a hungry head,  
Like an empty stomach, ought to be fed?  
Looking into myself, I find this true,  
So I hardly can figure it false in you.

And you don't *read* poetry very much.

(Such

Is my own case also.) "But," you cry,  
"I have n't the time." Beloved, you lie.

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

When a scandal happens in Buffalo,  
You ponder the details, con and pro;  
If poets were pugilists, could n't you tell  
Which of the poets licked John L.?  
If poets were counts, could your wife be  
fooled  
As to which of the poets married a Gould?  
And even *my* books might have some hope  
If poetry books were books of dope.

"You 're a little bit swift," you say to me,  
"See!"

You open your library. There you show  
Your "favorite poets," row on row,  
Chaucer, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Poe,  
A Homer unread, an uncut Horace,  
A wholly forgotten William Morris.  
My friend, my friend, can it be you thought  
That these were poets whom you had bought?  
These are dead men's bones. You bought  
their mummies

---

## DEAD MEN ' S D U S T

---

To display your style, like clothing dummies.  
But when do they talk to you? Some one  
said

That these were poets which should be read,  
So here they stand. But tell me, pray,  
How many poets who live to-day  
Have you, of your own volition, sought,  
Discovered and tested, proved and *bought*,  
With a grateful glow that the dollar you  
spent  
Netted the poet his ten per cent.?

“ But hold on,” you say, “ I am reading  
*you.*”

True,  
And pitying, too, the sorry end  
Of the dog I tried this on. My friend,  
I *can* write poetry — good enough  
So you would n't look at the worthy stuff.  
But knowing what you prefer to read  
I 'm setting the pace at about your speed,

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

Being rather convinced these truths will hold  
you

A little bit better than if I 'd told you  
A genuine poem and forgotten to scold you.  
Besides, when I open my little room  
And see *my* poets, each in his tomb,  
With his mouth dust-stopped, I turn from  
the shelf  
And I must scold you, or scold myself.



---

# Y O U T O O

---

## YOU TOO

Did you ever make some small success

And brag your little brag,

As if your breathing would impress

The world and fix your tag

Upon it, so that all might see

The label loudly reading, "ME!"

And when you thought you 'd gained  
the height

And, sunning in your own delight,

You preened your plumes and crowed

"All right!"

Did something wipe you out of sight?

Unless you did this many a time

You need n't stop to read this rime.

When I was mamma's little joy

And not the least bit tough,

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

I 'd sometimes whop some other boy  
    (If he were small enough)  
And for a week I 'd wear a chip,  
And at the uplift of a lip  
I 'd lord it like a pigmy pope,  
Until, when I had run my rope,  
Some bullet-headed little Swope  
Would clean me out as slick as soap.  
No doubt you were as bad, or worse,  
Or else you had not read this verse.

All women were like pica print  
    When I was young and wise;  
I 'd read their very souls by dint  
    Of looking in their eyes.  
And in those limpid souls I 'd see  
A very fierce regard for me.  
And then — my, my, it makes me faint!—  
Peroxide and a pinkish paint  
Gave me the hard, hard heart complaint.  
I saw the sham, I felt the taint,

---

## Y O U T O O

---

Yet if she 'd pat me once or twice,  
I 'd follow like a little fyce.

I never played a little game  
And won a five or ten,  
But, presto! I was not the same  
As common makes of men.  
Not Solomon and all his kind  
Held half the wisdom of my mind.  
And so I 'd swell to twice my size,  
And throw my hat across my eyes,  
And chew a quill, and wear red ties,  
And tip you off the stock to rise —  
Until, at last, I 'd have to steal  
The baby's bank to buy a meal.

I speak as if these things remained  
All in the perfect tense,  
And yet I don't suppose I 've gained  
A single ounce of sense.  
I scoff these tales of yesterday

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

In quite a supercilious way,  
But by to-morrow I may bump  
Into some newer game and jump!  
You 'll think I am the only trump  
In all the deck until — kerslump!  
Unless you 'll do the same some time,  
Of course you have n't read this rime.

---

## D O N ' T Y O U ?

---

### DON'T YOU ?

When the plan that I have to grow suddenly  
rich

Grows weary of leg and drops into the ditch,  
And scheme follows scheme

Like the web of a dream

To glamor and glimmer and shimmer and  
seem,

Only seem;

And then, when the world looks unfadably  
blue,

If my rival sails by,

With his head in the sky,

And sings "How is business?" why, what  
do I do?

Well, I claim that I aim to be honest and  
true,

But I sometimes lie. Don't you?

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

When something at home is decidedly wrong,  
When somebody sings a false note in the  
    song,

Too low or too high,  
And, you hardly know why,  
But it wrangles and jangles and runs all  
    awry,

    Aye, awry!

And then, at the moment when things are  
    askew,

Some cousin sails in  
With a face all a-grin,  
And a "Do I intrude? Oh, I see that I do!"  
Well, then, though I aim to be honest and  
    true,

Still I sometimes lie. Don't you?

When a man that I need has some foible or  
    fad,

Not very commendable, not very bad;  
Perhaps it 's his daughter,

---

## D O N ' T Y O U ?

---

And some one has taught her  
To daub up an "oil" or to streak up a  
"water";

What a "water"!

And her grass is green green and her sky  
is blue blue,

But her father, with pride,

In a stagey aside

Asks my "candid opinion." Then what do  
I do?

Well, I claim that I aim to be honest and  
true,

But I sometimes lie. Don't you?

DON'T TAKE YOUR TROUBLES  
TO BED

You may labor your fill, friend of mine, if  
you will;

You may worry a bit, if you must;

You may treat your affairs as a series of  
cares,

You may live on a scrap and a crust;

But when the day 's done, put it out of your  
head;

Don't take your troubles to bed.

You may batter your way through the thick  
of the fray,

You may sweat, you may swear, you may  
grunt;

You may be a jack-fool if you must, but this  
rule



---

## DON'T TAKE TROUBLES TO BED

---

Should ever be kept at the front:  
Don't fight with your pillow, but lay down  
    your head  
And kick every worriment out of the bed.

That friend or that foe (which he is, I don't  
    know),

Whose name we have spoken as Death,  
Hovers close to your side, while you run or  
    you ride,

And he envies the warmth of your breath;  
But he turns him away, with a shake of his  
    head,

When he finds that you don't take your  
    troubles to bed.

GOOD

You look at yourself in the glass and say:

“ Really, I ’m rather *distingué*.

To be sure my eyes

Are assorted in size,

And my mouth is a crack

Running too far back,

And I hardly suppose

An unclassified nose

Is a mark of beauty, as beauty goes;

But still there ’s something about the whole

Suggesting a beauty of — well, say soul.”

And this is the reason that photograph-galleries

Are able to pay employees’ salaries.

Now, this little mark of our brotherhood,

By which each thinks that his looks are  
good,

---

## G O O D

---

Is laudable quite in you and me,  
Provided we not only look, but be.

I look at my poem and you hear me say:  
“ Really, it ’s clever in its way.

The theme is old

And the style is cold.

These words run rude;

That line is crude;

And here is a rhyme

Which fails to chime,

And the metre dances out of time.

Oh, it is n’t so bright it ’ll blind the sun,

But it ’s better than this by Such-a-one.”

And this is the reason I and my creditors

Curse the “unreasoning whims” of editors,

And yet, if one writes for a livelihood,

He ought to believe that his work is good,

Provided the form that his vanity takes

Not only believes, but also makes.

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

And there is our neighbor. We 've heard  
him say:

“ Really, I 'm not the commonest clay.

Brown got his dust

By betraying a trust;

And Jones's wife

Leads a terrible life;

While I *have* heard

That Robinson's word

Is n't quite as good as Gas preferred.

And Smith has a soul with seamy cracks,

For he talks of people behind their backs! ”

And these are the reasons the penitentiary

Holds open house for another century.

True, we want no man in our neighborhood

Who does n't consider his character good,

But then it ought to be also true

He not only knows to consider, but do.

---

# S U C C E S S

---

## SUCCESS

It 's little the difference where you arrive;  
The serious question is how you strive.  
Are you up to your eyes in a wild romance?

Does your lady lead you a dallying dance?  
Do you question if love be fate, or chance?  
Oh, the world will ask "Did he get the girl?"

Though gentleman, coxcomb, clown or churl,

Master or menial of passion's whirl.

But it *is n't* that. The world will run  
Though you never bequeath it daughter or son,

But what, O lover, will come to you  
If you be not chivalrous, honest, true?  
As far ahead as a man may think,

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

You can see your little soul shrivel and  
shrink.

It 's not, " Do you win? "

It is " What have you been? "

Are you stripped for the world-old, world-  
wide race

For the metal which shines like the sun's  
own face

Till it dazzles us blind to the mean and  
base?

Do you say to yourself, " When I have my  
hoard,

I will give of the plenty which I have stored,  
If the Lord bless me, I will bless the Lord " ?

And do you forget, as you pile your pelf,

What is the gift you are giving yourself?

Though your mountain of gold may dazzle  
the day,

Can you climb its height with your feet of  
clay?

---

## S U C C E S S

---

Oh, it is n't the stamp on the metal you  
win;

It 's the stamp on the metal you coin within.

It 's not what you give;

It is " What do you live? "

Are you going to sail the polar seas  
To the point of ninety and north degrees,  
Where the very words in your larynx freeze?  
Well, the mob may ask " Did he reach the  
pole?

Though fair, or foul, did he touch the  
goal? "

But if that be the spirit which stirs your  
soul,

Off, off from the land below the zeroes;  
For you are not of the stuff of heroes.

Ho! many a man can lead men forth  
To the fearsome end of the Farthest North,  
But can you be faithful for woe or weal  
In a land where nothing but self is leal?

---

# IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

Oh, it is n't "How far?"

It is what you are.

And it is n't your lookout where you arrive,  
But it 's up to you as to how you strive.



---

# THE GRILL

---

## THE GRILL

Why do you?

What 's it to you?

I know you do, for I 've seen the gruesome  
feeling simmer through you.

I 've seen it rise behind your eyes  
And take your features by surprise.

I 've seen it in your half-hid grin  
And the tilting-upness of your chin.

Good-natured though you are and fair, as  
you have often boasted,

Still you like to hear the other man artistically  
roasted.

Whenever the star secures the stage with the  
spotlight in the centre,

Why should the anvil chorus think it has the  
cue to enter?

---

## I M P E R T I N E N T P O E M S

---

Whenever the prima donna trills the E  
above the clef,

Why should the brasses orchestrate the bass  
in double f?

It 's funny,

But it 's even money,

You like to spy the buzzing fly in the other  
fellow's honey.

Though you have said that honest bread

Demands no honey on it spread,

And if we eat the crusty wheat

With appetite, it needs no sweet,

Still I have noticed you were not at all in-  
clined to cry

Because the man the bees had blest was  
bothered with the fly.

Whenever the *chef* concocts a dish which sets  
the world to tasting,

---

## T H E G R I L L

---

Why does the cooking-school get out its  
recipes for basting?

Whenever a sprinter beats the bunch from  
the pistol-shot, why is it

The heavy hammer throwers get together  
for a visit?

Excuse me!

Did you accuse me

Of turning the spit a little bit myself?

Why, you amuse me!

Did n't I scratch the sulphurous match

And blow the flame to make it catch?

Did n't you trot to get the pot

To heat the water good and hot?

Then, seizing on our victim, if we found no  
greater sin,

Did n't we call him "a lobster," and cheer-  
fully chuck him in?

BLOOD IS RED

Some of us don't drink, some of us do;  
Some of us use a word or two.  
Most of us, maybe, are half-way ripe  
For deeds that would n't look well in type.  
All of us have done things, no doubt,  
We don't very often brag about.  
We are timidly good, we are badly bold,  
But there 's hope for the worst of us, I hold,  
If there be a few things we did n't do,  
For the reason that we so wanted to.

Some of us sin on a smaller scale.  
(We don't mind minnows, we shy at a  
whale.)

We speak of a woman with half a sneer,  
We sit on our hands when we ought to cheer.  
The salad we mix in the bowl of the heart

---

## B L O O D I S R E D

---

We sometimes make a little too tart  
For home consumption. We growl, we nag,  
But we 're not quite lost if we sometimes  
drag

The hot words back and make them mild  
At the moment they fret to be running wild.

Don't pin your faith on the man or woman  
Who never is tempted. We 're mostly  
human.

And whoever he be who never has felt  
The red blood sing in the veins and melt  
The ice of convention, caste and creed,  
To the very last barrier, has no need  
To raise his brows at the rest of us.  
It bides its time in the rest of us,  
And well for him if he do not do  
That which the strength of him wants him  
to.

## DIAGNOSIS

You have a grudge against the man  
Who did the thing you could n't do.  
You hatched the scheme, you laid the plan,  
And yet you could n't push it through.  
You strained your soul and could n't win;  
He gave a breath and it was easy.  
You smile and swallow your chagrin,  
But, oh, the swallow makes you queasy.

I know your illness, for, you see,  
The diet never pleases me.

Your dearest friend has made a strike,  
Has placed his mark above the crowd,  
Has won the thing which *you* would like  
And you are glad for him, and proud.  
Your tongue is swift, your cheek is red,

---

## D I A G N O S I S

---

If some one speak to his detraction,  
And yet, the fact the thing is said  
Affords you half a satisfaction.

I see the workings of your mind  
Because my own is so inclined.

You tell me fame is hollow squeak,  
You say that wealth is carking care;  
And to live care-free a single week  
Is more than years of work and wear.  
Alexander weeps his highest place,  
Diogenes is happy sunning!  
What matters it who wins the race  
So you have had the joy of running?

And yet, you covet prize and pelf.  
I know it, for I do, myself.

## THE DILETTANTE

To lie outright in the light of day  
    I 'm not sufficiently skilful,  
But I practice a bit, in an amateur way,  
    The lie which is hardly wilful;  
The society lie and the business lie  
    And the lie I have had to double,  
And the lie that I lie when I don't know why  
    And the truth is too much trouble.  
For this I am willing to take your blame  
Unless you have sometimes done the same.

To be a fool of an A1 brand  
    I 'm not sufficiently clever,  
But I often have tried my 'prentice hand  
    In a callow and crude endeavor;  
A fool with the money for which I 've toiled,  
    A fool with the word I 've spoken,



---

## T H E D I L E T T A N T E

---

And the foolish fool who is fooled and foiled.

On a maiden's finger broken.

If you never yourself have made a slip,  
I 'm willing to watch you curl your lip.

And yet my blood and my bone resist

If you dub me fool and liar.

I set my teeth and double my fist

And my brow is flushed with fire.

You I deny and you I defy

And I vow I will make you rue it;

And I lie when I say that I never lie,

Which proves me a fool to do it!

You may jerk your thumb at me and grin

If liar and fool you never have been.

DESIRE

Oh, the ripe, red apple which handily hung  
And flaunted and taunted and swayed and  
    swung,

Till it itched your fingers and tickled your  
    tongue,

For it was juicy and you were young!

But you held your hands and you turned  
    your head,

And you thought of the switch which hung  
    in the shed,

And you did n't take it (or so you said),

    But tell me — did n't you want to?

Oh, the rounded maiden who passed you  
    by,

Whose cheek was dimpled, whose glance  
    was shy,

---

## D E S I R E

---

But who looked at you out of the tail of  
her eye,  
And flirted her skirt just a trifle high!  
Oh, you were human and not sedate,  
But you thought of the narrow way and  
straight,  
And you did n't follow (or so you state),  
But tell me — did n't you want to?

Oh, the golden chink and the sibilant  
sign  
Which sang of honey and love and wine,  
Of pleasure and power when the sun's  
ashine  
And plenty and peace in the day's decline!  
Oh, the dream was schemed and the play was  
planned;  
You had nothing to do but to reach your  
hand,  
But you did n't (or so I understand),  
But tell me — did n't you want to?

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

Oh, you wanted to, yes; and hence you crow.  
That the Want To within you found its foe  
Which wanted you *not* to want to, and so  
You were able to answer always "No."  
So you tell yourself you are pretty fine clay  
To have tricked temptation and turned it  
away;

But wait, my friend, for a different day!  
Wait till you *want to* want to!

---

## H U S H

---

### HUSH

What 's the best thing that you ever have  
done?

The whitest day,

The cleverest play

That ever you set in the shine of the sun?

The time that you felt just a wee bit proud

Of defying the cry of the cowardly crowd

And stood back to back with God?

Aye, I notice you nod,

But silence yourself, lest you bring me  
shame

That I have no answering deed to name.

What 's the worst thing that ever you  
did?

The darkest spot,

The blackest blot

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

On the page you have pasted together and  
hid?

Ah, sometimes you think you 've forgotten  
it quite,

Till it crawls in your bed in the dead of the  
night

And brands you its own with a blush.

What was it? Nay, hush!

Don't tell it to me, for fear it be known

That I have an answering blush of my  
own.

But whenever you notice a clean hit made,

Sing high and clear

The sounding cheer

You would gladly have heard for the play  
you played.

And when a man walks in the way forbidden,

Think you of the thing you have happily  
hidden

And spare him the sting of your tongue.

---

## H U S H

---

Do I do that which I 've sung?

Well, it may be I don't and it may be I do,

But I 'm telling the thing which is good for  
*you!*

---

# IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

## PLUG

As you have n't asked me for advice, I 'll  
give it to you now:

Plug!

No matter who or what you are, or where  
you are, the how

Is plug.

You may take your dictionary unabridged  
and con it through,

You may swallow the Britannica and all its  
retinue,

But here I lay it f. o. b. — the only word  
for you

Is plug.

Are you in the big procession, but away  
behind the band?

Plug!



---

P L U G

---

On the cobble, or asphaltum, in the mud or  
in the sand,

Plug!

Oh, you 'll hear the story frequently of how  
some clever man

Cut clean across the country, so that now  
he 's in the van;

You may think that *you* will do it, but I don't  
believe you can,

So plug!

Are you singing in the chorus? Do you want  
to be a star?

Plug!

You may think that you 're a genius, but I  
don't believe you are,

So plug!

Oh, you 'll hear of this or that one who was  
born without a name,

Who slept eleven hours a day and dreamed  
the way to fame,

---

# IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

Who simply could n't push it off, so rapidly  
it came!

But plug.

Are you living in the valley? Do you want  
to reach the height?

Plug!

Where the hottest sun of day is and the cold-  
est stars of night?

Plug!

Oh, it may be you 're a fool, but if a fool  
you want to be,

If you want to climb above the crowd so  
every one can see

Just how a fool may look when he is at his  
apogee,

Why, plug!

Can you make a mile a minute? Do you  
want to make it two?

Plug!

---

## P L U G

---

Are you good and up against it? Well, the  
only thing to do

Is plug.

Oh, you 'll find some marshy places, where  
the crust is pretty thin,

And when you think you 're gliding out,  
you 're only sliding in,

But the only thing for you to do is think of  
this and grin,

And plug.

There 's many a word that 's prettier that  
has n't half the cheer

Of plug.

It may not save you in a day, but try it for a  
year.

Plug!

And to show you I am competent to tell you  
what is what,

---

# IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

I assure you that I never yet have made a  
centre shot,  
Which surely is an ample demonstration that  
I ought  
To plug.

---

# CONSCIENCE PIANISSIMO

---

## CONSCIENCE PIANISSIMO

You are honest as daylight. You 're often  
assured

That your word is as good as your note —  
unsecured.

We could trust you with millions unaudited,  
but —

(Tut, tut!

There is always a “but,”

So don't get excited,) I 'm pained to per-  
ceive

It is seldom I notice you grumble or grieve  
When the custom-house officer pockets your  
tip

And passes the contraband goods in your  
grip.

You would scorn to be shy on your ante, I 'm  
certain,

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

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But skinning your Uncle you 're rather expert in.

Well, I 'm proud that no taint of the sort touches me.

(For I 've never been over the water, you see.)

Your yardstick 's a yard and your goods are all wool;

Your bushel 's four pecks and you measure it full.

You are proud of your business integrity, yet —

(Don't fret!

There is always a "yet,")

I never noticed a sign of distress, or

Disturbance in you, when the upright assessor

Has listed your property somewhere about  
Half what you would take were you selling  
it out.

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## CONSCIENCE PIANISSIMO

---

You 're as true to the world as the world to  
its axis,

But you chuckle to swear off your personal  
taxes.

As for me, I would scorn to do any such  
thing,

(Though I may have considered the question  
last spring.)

You have notions of right. You would  
count it a sin

To cheat a blind billionaire out of a pin.

You have a contempt for a pettiness, still —  
(Don't chill!

There is always a "still,")

I never have noticed you storm with neglect  
Because the conductor had failed to collect,  
Or growl that the game was n't run on the  
square

When your boy in the high school paid only  
half-fare.

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## IMPERTINENT POEMS

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The voice of your conscience is lusty and  
audible,

But a railroad — good heavens! why, that 's  
only laudable.

Of course, *I* am quite in a different class;  
For me, it is painful to ride on a pass!



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# Y O U W A I T

---

## YOU WAIT

When you and I were little boys,  
Afraid of girls and fond of toys,  
It often chanced that some distress  
Imposed upon our littleness.  
Perhaps we entered in the lists  
Against some boy with faster fists;  
Perhaps the teacher kept us in  
Not for our own, but others' sin;  
Perhaps parental wrath was dealt  
(Against all rules) below the belt;  
And, smarting in our childish hate,  
We threatened "Never mind! you wait!  
I 'll make you sorry some day, when  
I get to be a big *man*. Then  
I — *well* — I will."

And now that we are little men,  
It likewise happens, now and then,

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## IMPERTINENT POEMS

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We have a round or two with Fate  
And find we 're somewhat underweight.  
Perhaps your services are spurned,  
Perhaps my poem is returned;  
Perhaps some hand preëmpts the peach  
Just ripening within your reach;  
Perhaps some critic gently swats  
Me somewhere in the vital spots.  
And then, although we dryly grin,  
The little voice is heard within; —  
“ I 'll show these fellows some day, when  
I get to be a *big* man. Then  
I — well — I *will*.”

And though a larger place we fill,  
The Nemesis is working still.  
The author's favorite book is cursed,  
The judge's ruling is reversed;  
The Congressman sits meekly by  
Unfavored of the Speaker's eye;  
The Senator stands down the line

---

## Y O U W A I T

---

When Cabinet officials dine;  
The President's knee becomes infirm,  
Before the god, Another Term.  
And in the inmost heart of each  
There cries again the boyish speech; —  
“ It will be different some day when  
I am a *great big* man. Ah, then  
I — well — *I* will.”

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# IMPERTINENT POEMS

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## PASS

Did somebody give you a pat on the back?

Pass it on!

Let somebody else have a taste of the smack,

Pass it on!

If it heightens your courage, or lightens your  
pack,

If it kisses your soul, with a song in the  
smack,

Maybe somebody else has been dressing in  
black;

Pass it on!

God gives you a smile, not to make it a  
yawn;

Pass it on!

Did somebody show you a slanderous mess?

Pass it by!

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P A S S

---

When a brook 's flowing by, will you drink  
at the cess?

Pass it by!

Dame Gossip 's a wanton, whatever her  
dress;

Her sire was a lie and her dam was a guess,  
And a poison is in her polluting caress;

Pass it by!

Unless you 're a porker, keep out of the sty.

Pass it by!

Did somebody give you an insolent word?

Pass it up!

'T is the creak of a cricket, the pwit of a  
bird;

Pass it up!

Shake your fist at the sea! Is its majesty  
blurred?

Blow your breath at the sky! Is its purity  
slurred?

---

# IMPERTINENT POEMS

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But the shallowest puddle, how easily stirred!

Pass it up!

Does the puddle invite you to dip in your  
cup?

Pass it up!

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## M O V E

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### MOVE

We are on the main line of a crowded track;  
We 've got to go forward; we can't go  
back

And run the risk of colliding:  
We must make schedule, not now and again,  
But always, forever and ever, amen!

Or else switch off on a siding.  
If ever we loaf, like a car in the yard,  
Does n't somebody bump us, and bump us  
hard,

I wonder?

You 've succeeded in building a pretty fair  
trade,

But can you sit down in the grateful shade  
And kill time cutting up capers?

Or must you hustle and scheme and sweat,

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

Though the shine be fine or the weather be  
wet,

And keep your page in the papers?

If ever you fail to be pulling the strings,  
Are n't some of your rivals around doing  
things,

I wonder?

Your a first-class salesman. You know your  
line;

Your house is good and your goods are  
fine,

So you fill your book with orders,

But can you get quit of the ball and chain,  
Or are you in jail on a railroad train,

With blue-coated men for warders?

If you sent your samples and cut out the  
trip,

Would n't somebody else soon be lugging  
your grip,

I wonder?



---

## M O V E

---

You are starred on the bills and are chummy  
with fame;

The man on the corner could tell you your  
name

At three o'clock in the morning,

But can you depend on the mind of the mob?

Can you tell your press-agent to look for  
a job,

Or give your manager warning?

Should you lie down to sleep, with your  
laurels beneath,

Would n't somebody else soon be wearing  
your wreath,

I wonder?

Oh, I 'm willing to work, but I wish I could  
lag,

Not feeling as if I were "it" for tag,

Or last in follow-my-leader;

There is only one spot where, I have n't a  
doubt,

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## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

Nobody will try to be crowding me out,

And that is under the cedar.

And even in that place, will Gabriel's  
trump

Come nagging along and be making me  
jump!

I wonder?

---

# A R E Y O U Y O U ?

---

## ARE YOU YOU ?

Are you a trailer, or are you a trolley?

Are you tagged to a leader through wisdom  
and folly?

Are you Somebody Else, or You?

Do you vote by the symbol and swallow it  
“straight”?

Do you pray by the book, do you pay by  
the rate?

Do you tie your cravat by the calendar's  
date?

Do you follow a cue?

Are you a writer, or that which is worded?

Are you a shepherd, or one of the herded?

Which are you — a What or a Who?

It sounds well to call yourself “one of the  
flock,”

---

## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

But a sheep is a sheep after all. At the  
block

You 're nothing but mutton, or possibly  
stock.

Would you flavor a stew?

Are you a being and boss of your soul?

Or are you a mummy to carry a scroll?

Are you Somebody Else, or You?

When you finally pass to the heavenly  
wicket

Where Peter the Scrutinous stands on his  
picket,

Are you going to give him a *blank* for a  
ticket?

Do you think it will do?

THE BUBBLE - FLIES

Let me read a homily  
Concerning an anomaly  
I view  
In you.

Whatever you are striving for,  
Whatever you are driving for,  
'T is not alone because you crave  
To be successful that you slave  
To swim upon the topmost wave.  
You care less what your station is,  
But more what your relation is.  
To be a bit above the rest!  
To be upon, or of, the crest!  
Ah! that is where the trouble lies  
Which stirs you little bubble-flies.

(I sneer these sneers, but just the same  
I keep my fingers in the game.)

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## IMPERTINENT POEMS

---

See! you have eat-and-drinkables  
And portables and thinkables  
And yet  
You fret.

For what? Let 's reach the heart of you  
And see the funny part of you.  
For what? I find the soul and seed  
Of it is not your lack or need,  
Or even merely vulgar greed.  
Gold? You may have a store of it,  
But — some one else has more of it.  
Fame? Pretty things are said of you,  
But — some one is ahead of you.  
Place? You disprize your easy one  
For some one's high and breezy one.

(I smile these smiles to soothe my soul,  
But squint one eye upon the goal.)

Tell me! what 's your capacity  
Compared to your voracity?

---

# T H E   B U B B L E - F L I E S

---

*I* guess

'T is less.

'And so I strike these attitudes  
And tender you these platitudes; —  
Not wishing wealth, or spurning it,  
Not hoarding it, or burning it  
Is equal to the earning it.  
Life's race is in the riding it,  
Not in the word deciding it.  
And after all is said and uttered  
The keenest taste is bread-and-buttered.

'(And yet — and yet — my palate aches  
For pallid pie and pasty cakes!)

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# IMPERTINENT POEMS

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## HOW DID YOU DIE ?

Did you tackle that trouble that came your  
way

With a resolute heart and cheerful?

Or hide your face from the light of day

With a craven soul and fearful?

Oh, a trouble 's a ton, or a trouble 's an ounce,

Or a trouble is what you make it,

And it is n't the fact that you 're hurt that  
counts,

But only how did you take it?

You are beaten to earth? Well, well, what 's  
that?

Come up with a smiling face.

It 's nothing against you to fall down flat,

But to lie there — that 's disgrace.



---

## H O W D I D Y O U D I E ?

---

The harder you 're thrown, why the higher  
you bounce;

Be proud of your blackened eye!

It is n't the fact that you 're licked that  
counts;

It 's how did you fight — and why?

And though you be done to the death, what  
then?

If you battled the best you could,

If you played your part in the world of men,  
Why, the Critic will call it good.

Death comes with a crawl, or comes with a  
pounce,

And whether he 's slow or s pry,

It is n't the fact that you 're dead that counts,  
But only how did you die?

THE END.

















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